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Senator Long's Opportunity to Win Fame

Senator Edward V. Long, the obscure Missouri Democrat who proposes to umpire a veracity dispute between Senator Robert F. Kennedy and FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, has a chance to become famous.

Hoover is the No. 1 sacred cow in this country and Kennedy is both Long's senatorial colleague and heir apparent to the Kennedy mystique. No one ever got the better of Hoover except Nero Wolfe, who unfortunately is a fictional character, and Kennedy is no slouch either when it comes to keeping the family flag flying.

Long is distressed because the FBI has been engaging in electronic espionage on a national scale, though why this is news to him is unclear. Hoover claims Kennedy authorized it when attorney general. Kennedy says perhaps he should have known but didn't.

He is also telling friends that there was bad blood between him and Hoover from the start because President John F. Kennedy broke the pattern of direct White House

access by the FBI director. But if the late President insisted upon his brother's supervisory rights over the FBI, why did not Robert Kennedy exercise them?

The answers will be informative but in essence that argument is a sideshow.

There are at least three other defendants who in any genuine investigation of the federal government's spreading invasion of privacy are involved. They are President Johnson, Acting Attorney General Ramsay Clark and Congress.

Hoover has direct personal access to the President, who has intertwined his operations with those of the Central Intelligence Agency. Any notion that the President does not know and support what Hoover is doing is laughable.

The President can plead executive privilege but an attorney general cannot. Does Clark know all about what the FBI does and if not, why not?

Should the Justice Department prove reticent, it would seem proper to inquire why it sent Solicitor General Thur-

good Marshall into open court to confess piously to wiretapping at the moment when the cases of Bobby Baker and Fred Black were at a crucial stage.

Baker is the former secretary to the Senate majority when Johnson led it and Black was Baker's business associate. Baker is on the eve of his long awaited trial for assorted larcenies and Black is appealing an income tax conviction. Both hope to go free on the basis of the government's surprise admission.

No single executive act has created as much suspicion as this one. It has never been explained convincingly.

Then there is Congress, which has poured money and goosegrease upon the FBI director in all seasons. Did it ask what he did with the money and if so, did he explain? If he did explain, was it countenanced by that guardian of the public morality?

The next Congress is being touted as one that will assert itself about what goes on here anyway. It will have before it a measure to make the ap-

pointment of the FBI director subject to Senate confirmation. No doubt it would confirm Hoover if the past timidity is any guide. In debate it could, however, ventilate the subject of the FBI's extralegal powers and the Baker-Black business.

Rex Stout, Nero Wolfe's creator, contends that no truly democratic country could tolerate the FBI's operations.

Long's real task is to get the facts about that.